

PURPOSE AND NEED

The Perris Valley Line (PVL) purpose and need was developed through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Alternatives Analysis (AA) process. The AA process is intended to identify which transit improvements would best meet locally defined Goals and Objectives for a specified study area. The AA purpose and need was developed based upon understanding the transportation conditions, problems, and issues within the specified study area that should be addressed by a major transportation investment.

The AA identified transportation improvements to alleviate traffic congestion within the study area, thereby improving mobility for people and goods. These transportation improvements should also provide and/or improve linkages to the overall transportation system, support achievement of air quality goals, while minimizing environmental and community impacts to the extent possible.

Transportation facilities within the study area include Interstate 215 (I-215) and the San Jacinto Branch Line (SJBL). I-215 is the only continuous north-south highway facility east of I-15 in western Riverside County. I-215 traverses portions of Riverside, Moreno Valley, Perris, Menifee, Murrieta, and Temecula and serves other communities along the corridor including San Jacinto, Hemet, and unincorporated county areas. The SJBL is a rail line that generally runs west of and parallel to I-215 between Riverside and Perris. The SJBL is currently only used by Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) as a very low volume freight route. The AA and other planning studies (see following REGIONAL AND LOCAL PLANNING CONTEXTS) have considered use of the SJBL right of way and have concluded the under-used rail corridor could be used to relieve existing and forecasted traffic congestion.

In addition, the AA process included a public outreach component (general public, affected communities, and stakeholders, etc.) that identified these needs:

- To provide transit travel options to growing population and employment centers
- To coordinate transportation planning and community development
- To improve use of underutilized transportation resources

PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 1 – Improve the Transportation System with Alternate Travel Choices

- Reduce highway congestion within the corridor
- Improve the attractiveness of public transit as a commuter alternative to the auto by making it more available, reliable, and convenient
- Establish and expand the regional transit network within and beyond the study corridor
- Promote a “seamless” regional transit system

Goal 2 - Promote Community/Transit Oriented Development (TOD)

- Strengthen the older urban communities as centers of economic opportunity
- Broaden the range and availability of public transportation alternatives between the various urban areas along the corridor for a variety of trip purposes
- Encourage transit-friendly communities, at higher densities
- Foster TOD around transit stations
- Provide improved mobility opportunities to the transit dependent

Goal 3 – Minimize Adverse Environmental Impacts

- Contain residential, commercial, and industrial “sprawl” development
- Conform to the State Implementation Plan (SIP) as required by the Clean Air Act (CAA) Amendments of 1990
- Minimize impacts to the natural and human-made environment
- Minimize the need for new ROW, thereby reducing land use impacts to the study corridor

Goal 4 – Invest and Deploy Resources Effectively and Efficiently

- Invest resources effectively
- Improve the productivity and cost effectiveness of transit services in the corridor
- Enhance and build upon the existing public transportation system within the corridor
- Select investments that build upon underused and abandoned transportation resource

REGIONAL AND LOCAL PLANNING CONTEXTS

State and local planning efforts applicable to the project corridor anticipate an increasing need for transportation alternatives and also specify, in some cases, the PVL as a potential solution to projected transportation needs. The transportation needs are associated with the forecasted growth in population and employment, and the accompanying increases in congestion. The studies and reports described below for the I-215/SJBL alignment and the region have underscored the need for diversifying transportation service. These studies and reports support the conclusion that there is not sufficient capacity on the existing transportation network to meet the demands of the corridor, even with planned increases in roadway capacity and bus service. The studies and reports include:

- Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)

The RTP and RTIP are the responsibility of the SCAG, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for southern California, and are required by statewide and metropolitan planning rules and regulations. The plans examine demographic, economic, and transportation trends and needs within a specified planning area in order to develop an ongoing strategy for implementing transportation investments to meet identified needs. The PVL is included in both the RTP (adopted 2008) and RTIP (adopted 2008). The RTP is an update to the previous Regional Transportation Plan (2004) and presents an assessment of the overall growth and economic trends in the SCAG region through the year 2035. The RTP is necessary to receive state and federal funding, and is consistent with federal and state requirements. The RTP is the culmination of a multi-year effort focusing on maintaining and improving the transportation system through a balanced approach. This balanced approach considered transportation system preservation, operation and management; improved coordination between land use decisions and transportation investments; and strategic expansion of the system to accommodate future growth. The RTIP is a listing of all funded transportation projects proposed over a six-year period (Fiscal Years 2008/09 – 2013/14) for the SCAG region. All projects included in the 2008 RTIP are consistent with the current RTP policies, programs, and projects.

Key projects related to the study corridor include county-wide SCRRA/Metrolink improvements, reconstruction and upgrade of the SJBL for passenger rail service between Riverside and Perris (Perris Valley Line), corridor and capacity improvements

for the I-215, I-15 and SR-91, and the Mid County Parkway which will provide a 16-mile parkway to improve regional east-west mobility between the San Jacinto and Perris areas.

- Riverside County Integrated Project (RCIP) – Riverside County Planning Department

Riverside County Planning Department developed the RCIP which includes a comprehensive, three-part, integrated program balancing the housing, transportation, and economic needs of a large population with the existing environment and available natural resources. RCIP accommodates continued growth by integrating the Riverside County General Plan with transportation and environmental issues. The three parts of the RCIP are the Riverside County General Plan (adopted 2003), the Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) (adopted 2003), and the Community and Environmental Transportation Acceptability Process (CETAP). The transportation component of the RCIP broadly examines opportunities on how the existing and future transportation system can contribute to and alleviate expected pressures from forecasted traffic volumes on the network. Benefits from alternative modes of Transportation are identified and include transit improvements that can generate opportunities for economic development in established urban centers by attracting compatible land use activities. Rail transit is envisioned as a travel option that can contribute to higher quality living environments by reducing auto dependency, concentrating compatible land uses, and relieving pressure to develop open space. Long-term plans call for an extension of the Riverside Transit Corridor along the San Jacinto branch line to the City of Hemet.

- City of Riverside General Plan 2025 - City of Riverside (2007)

The major principles underlying this General Plan are focusing future development near existing transportation corridors ensuring land uses are supported by an efficient local roadway network; embracing innovative solutions to congestion on freeways and regional arterials; supporting alternative modes of transportation such as walking, biking and transit; and ensuring that transportation options are maximized for all community members as necessary components of an effective and safe circulation system for Riverside. Circulation and mobility strategies must be comprehensive to overcome the City's long-term transportation challenges. This General Plan— and its two keystone elements, Land Use and Urban Design and Circulation and Community Mobility — provide such comprehensive strategies. The Land Use and Urban Design Element of the General Plan focuses on incorporating “smart growth” principle into planning and development decisions, and focusing development in already urbanized areas of the City rather than spreading growth to the urban fringes. The Circulation and Community Mobility Element of the General Plan acknowledges the need for alternative modes of transportation, and emphasizes the City’s support for the extension of SCRRA/Metrolink 91 to create the PVL.

- City of Perris General Plan 2030 - City of Perris (2005)

This General Plan is a 30-year guide for local government decision on growth, capital investment, and physical development in the City of Perris. Due to the interrelationship of urban and rural activities (employment, housing and services), and the low average density of existing land uses, the private automobile is the dominant mode of travel within the City of Perris. As the population grows, city roads will become increasingly congested. As a result, it is important to encourage increased ridership on public transit systems and increased use of alternative modes of transportation. The public transit system alternatives for City of Perris include: fixed route public transit systems, common bus carriers, and other local agency transit and paratransit services.

The Land Use Plan broadly describes the types of land uses and intensity of physical development that will be accommodated in the City of Perris through the year 2030. The Downtown Specific Plan discusses the future development of a commuter rail station planned for the old Perris Depot area, providing a new spur to Riverside, Los Angeles and Orange Counties, and expanding commuting options for residents of Perris. Implementation of the Downtown Specific Plan including related infrastructure improvements is anticipated to improve the appearance of Downtown. The purpose of the Circulation Element of the General Plan is to provide for a safe, convenient and efficient transportation system for the city. In order to meet this objective, the Circulation Element has been designed to accommodate the anticipated transportation needs based on the estimated intensities of various land uses within the region. The rail system plan would extend service between the Cities of Riverside and Perris along the San Jacinto Branch Line to the City of Hemet. The City of Perris rail line would continue to be used for freight activity along the BNSF and would share the line with future Metrolink service.

- Perris Commuter Rail Extension Patronage Estimate (2000)

This study estimated the potential for long distance commuter rail ridership from the southwestern area of Riverside County to Downtown Riverside via the Riverside Metrolink Station and then beyond to Los Angeles by way of existing Metrolink ROW and track. The study did not examine shorter trips between communities in southwestern Riverside County. The study concluded that the proposed commuter rail service would grow to more than 3,800 daily weekday trips by 2020.

- Union Pacific Riverside Branchline Improvement Study, Boyle Engineering for Riverside County Transportation Commission (2000)

This study examined the viability of acquisition of the Union Pacific Riverside Industrial Lead (UP RIL) by RCTC to provide service into the Riverside Downtown Station from the SJBL. Several track improvements and new track connections were examined. Two new connecting tracks were proposed: one at the crossing of the UP RIL and SJBL near Rustin Avenue, and the other connecting the UP to the BNSF at the Riverside Downtown Station.

- San Jacinto Branchline Commuter Rail Study, Boyle Engineering and Barton-Aschman Associates, Inc. for Riverside County Transportation Commission (1995)

This study examined the viability of commuter rail service along the SJBL ROW for commuters in Riverside, Moreno Valley, Perris, Hemet and San Jacinto. The commuter rail implementation plan consisted of 38 miles of railroad ROW upgrades between Riverside and Hemet/San Jacinto on the SJBL.

- Development Plan and Negative Declaration for the construction of Phase I of the proposed Perris Multimodal Facility (2006)

The City of Perris prepared a CEQA document (2005) that analyzed the environmental impacts of the first phase of a proposed multimodal facility that will initially serve buses, and later, commuter rail service. A NEPA Categorical Exclusion was also prepared for FTA in 2006 because of federal grant funds to the Riverside Transit Agency (RTA) for the facility.

- Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS): I-215 Improvements, California Department of Transportation (2001)

This FEIS evaluated improvements on I-215 and short segments of SR-60 and SR-91 in the Cities of Riverside and Moreno Valley. The selected High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Alternative included one HOV lane in each direction between University Avenue on I-215 in Riverside and Day Street on SR-60 in Moreno Valley. This joint Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and RCTC study was undertaken to implement improvements on approximately six miles of I-215 and portions of SR-60 and SR-91. Improvements from this project extend from north of the Eucalyptus interchange to north of the Columbia Avenue interchange on I-215; south of the Mission Inn Avenue interchange to the West Junction of I-215/SR-60 with SR-91; Main Street in the City of Riverside to the East Junction of I-215/SR-60 and to Frederick Street in the City of Moreno Valley on SR-60. The HOV Alternative required acquisition of additional ROW. This alternative would establish HOV connectivity between the existing HOV roadway on I-215 from University Avenue to east of the East Junction on SR-60 in the City of Moreno Valley. The HOV alternative was adopted into the RTP and the RTIP. It should be noted that the I-215 Improvements project identified the highway improvements that would maximize throughput with the existing freeway corridor. Even with the proposed improvements, congestion would remain severe and would not meet the forecasted demand.